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NEWS OF THE VALLEY
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# Mineral King Road Work Start Is Seen For 1969

VISALIA, Tulare Co. — The all-year Mineral King Highway cost estimates are now at $22 million and the State Division of Highways reports all signs are 'go" for construction starting in 1969.

The only hitch that has cropped up thus far in the surprisingly fast sequence of events on this key to the Walt Disney $35 million alpine development came when the state had to re-apply for a $3 million engineering and preliminary construction federal grant.

State Director of Public Works John Erreca in a telephone interview said an application to the federal Economic Development Agency earlier this summer lost out to other priorities.

However, the new application, to be submitted "within a week or so" is expected to get early favorable action. EDA officials in Washington said, "The money is there now, if the project meets the criteria for the grant."

This $3 million is the firstapplication for eventual state-federal 50-50 financing of the 25 miles of all-weather highway needed to serve the huge ski resort-summer play area development. The EDA funds are authorized to help create new jobs and spur the economy.

State highway engineers confirmed reports that preliminary surveys of the highway and its routing indicate an upward revision of the costs to $22 million. The preliminary surveys have advanced to the aerial mapping stages and actual road design should start by "the first of the year."

In the meantime Walt Disney has announced a step-up in his planning. Earlier this summer he announced the new resort would open in 1971 with a minimum of facilities as the high-

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# Road

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way was completed. He is moving construction schedules ahead to provide as much accommodation as possible by the 1971 opening date.

The resort's official opening, however, is tied to opening of the highway and Erreca said the 1971 completion date, "is a bit optomistic."

He said the state is funding the early survey and design work and will not be held up by lack of funding because of the re-application for federal aid and the time required to process this application in Washington.

Prior to actual design and construction work, the California Highway Commission must approve the final routing. Approximately 11 miles of the new highway will pass through Sequoia National Park and state and park officials have been meeting to work out the best routing.

**Switchback Relocation**

Park officials objected to one proposed switchback that would have doubled the highway through the park area. This switchback is being relocated. The highway also will pass in, by or through the Atwell Mill Grove of Sequoia trees and careful routing will be used to avoid cutting the monarchs themselves.

One area of contention that is arising is the size and width of the highway design. In the national parks, highways are designed for slower, tourist scenic purposes and are narrower than the state's two-lane high speed standards that would move traffic at 50 miles an hour from Three Rivers to Mineral King.

Once the design and engineering work is completed, in late 1968, or early 1969 the call will go out for the first bids. If funding and bidding go as fast as possible and there are no other hitches, state engineers estimated it will take two years to construct the highway.

**Need For Best Conditions**

They stressed these would be under ideal conditions. Disney has indicated from the time he won in the bidding for Mineral King that he wants to open the resort area as soon as is practical, even if the original opening is a small part of the final development.

In announcing the company's hopes for faster construction timetables, Robert Hicks said construction crews must go into the valley in larg numbers and 1969 and 1970 will see much heavy construction work there.